

CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION

FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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BULLETIN #9 *

Statewide News

FROM SACRAMENTO

RECIPIENTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS PICKET TOGETHER
SECOND CONVENTION OF POOR IN FONTANA
POLITICS AND POOR PEOPLE
NEWS IN THE NATION, THE CAPITAL, "QUOTES" AND "ITEMS"

SOCIAL WORKERS STRIKE IN LOS ANGELES AND SANTA BARBARA

Local #535, SOCIAL WORKERS UNION (Building Service Employees, AFL-CIO) pulled over 1500 of its members and sympathizers away from their paper-laden desks on June 1st and picketed 17 offices of the Bureau of Public Assistance in Los Angeles County. The issue which triggered this first strike of public welfare workers in California was the reversal by the County Board of Supervisors of a previous decision to grant the workers an 11% salary increase, and to reduce this to 5.5%. The original decision was by a 3 to 2 vote and the switch also 3-2.

Although about 60% of the social workers went on strike (and, of course this figure varied from day to day) its significance may well lie in the fact that at several of the offices picketed the picketing workers were joined by recipient groups who marched in solidarity with them because this union had proved the sincerity of its concern for the rights and needs of poor people. This proof was given during the food stamp crisis last fall, when the union put the needs of recipients above their own interests; in repeated help to the DELANO grape strikers; and through technical assistance outside of office hours to welfare rights organizations.

Support for the social workers strike has come from their international union, from other unions in the city and state, and from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS, which has urged a reluctant county administration to seek state or federal conciliation of the strike issues. These issues include a collective bargaining contract, on which informal negotiations had been proceeding fruitfully until the county board reneged on its salary decision and thus precipitated the strike action.

The SANTA BARBARA chapter of Local #535 simultaneously called a strike in order to get consideration for similar issues of low salaries and impossible work burdens.

The outcome of these two strikes cannot be predicted, but it is obvious that neither public welfare workers nor the poor on welfare will remain politely quiescent while government deals cavalierly with the welfare system in its impact on its workers and beneficiaries.

Other social workers struggles are going forward in Northern California, specifically:

In CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, Local #302 (Building Services Union) is working on a court test of the Hatch Act, seeking to shake narrow interpretations of this act and to challenge its constitutionality. A member of this union, Charles A. Risby,

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was asked to withdraw his candidacy for a party central committee by the county welfare department where he is employed on the grounds that such political activity is forbidden to employees a portion of whose salary comes from federal funds.

In SAN FRANCISCO, Local #400 (also Building Services) is continuing its effort to obtain justice for Harold Supriano, fired for using his own time in civil rights and anti-war activities (See Bulletin #8, p. 5).

The famous BEN PARRISH case in ALAMEDA County will be appealed from a recent ruling of the federal district court that the county was within its rights in firing PARRISH when he refused to go on night raids on welfare recipients. Solid legal authority exists in support of the courageous position of this worker and for the protection of welfare recipients against the kind of harassment practiced by this and other benighted California counties.

THE FONTANA CONVENTION WAS "FABULOUS"

With an attendance of more than 200 delegates and visitors from about 60 groups, the Fontana convention on the first weekend in June was "fabulous" on these counts:

---Under the leadership of the North Fontana BOARD of URBAN REFORM NOW (B.U.R.N) the local planning committee persisted in planning and staging this convention despite the absence of funding to bring delegates from outside the county, and despite a preoccupation with local activities by many low-income groups;

---Herculean efforts by such local activists as the Rickards, Mrs. Tisby, the Davis', Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Washington--aided by Mrs. Gladdin of San Bernardino (California Council of the Blind) produced food and money for local costs from business groups and from the O.E.O. agency, the DEPENDENCY PREVENTION COMMISSION;

---These persistent efforts also produced a steady stream of newspaper publicity about the convention which put the spotlight on the needs of poor people in this county and their right to participate and contribute to the anti-poverty, housing and welfare efforts;

---A busload of delegates from Bay Area groups rode all night on Friday to get to the convention, and other delegates from the Bay and other areas of the state came in car pools and at great sacrifice in order to have a chance to share ideas and experiences at Fontana; and

---The interest from governmental agencies, colleges and universities was greater in this second convention than in the first one, pointing up the impact of the repeated activity and the growing desire on the part of many groups for knowledge of and contacts with low-income groups.

The chairman of the convention, Willie Thompson of Berkeley, was elected chairman of a continuations committee charged with taking next steps to establish the CALIFORNIA FEDERATION OF THE POOR and to explore ways and means of holding conventions in other cities. Mr. Thompson stated that as soon as possible he would send all groups material summarizing the Fontana convention and setting forth its formal decisions and resolutions. (These included support for Ben Parrish and the Los Angeles social workers.)

At the Fontana meeting a constituent group--THE CALIFORNIA WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION--adopted a constitution, and directed its temporary chairman, Dr. Jacobus ten Broek, to convene a founding conference in the late summer or early fall.

FROM THE PRIMARY TO THE GENERAL ELECTION

Whatever the results of California's Primary elections (and these are incomplete as this bulletin is written), there will be some new local officials for the poor and their allies to deal with, and confirmed candidates for local, state and national office. The political picture which emerges from the Primary will be different in each locality of the state, and is likely to change as the campaign develops over the long, hot summer.

As soon as the winners and elected officials make known their recovery from their gruelling efforts for the Primary, it will be time for low-income groups--and their friends in labor, churches, and liberal circles--to seek public and private discussions with them of poverty issues. It is only through such conversations and confrontations that officials and candidates can become aware of these issues and the feelings of poor people about the need for different and better solutions and approaches!

Now is the time for all groups to sit down and carefully assess their local political situation, see who is who and what is what. Now is the time to make early decisions on issues and to seek attention and satisfaction from the politicians. Now is the time to decide whether to go it alone, or to seek help from political clubs (like the California Democratic Council) or to explore other coalition possibilities on specific issues. Now is the time for low-income groups to become more sophisticated and effective in political and governmental arenas!

OFFER: THE FOUNDATION will try to help any group, or more often get help for them, in preparing written proposals for presentation to elected officials and candidates. Such technical assistance may or may not be important in any particular situation; and is certainly no substitute for keeping responsibility wholly within the hands of low-income groups and their leadership for these key contacts.

NATIONAL NEWS

The hassle between some leaders of the poor, and Shriver and the leadership of the CITIZENS CRUSADE AGAINST POVERTY at the April meeting of the CRUSADE has perhaps been so well covered in all media and all circles, that further comment can add little.

The CRUSADE is currently undergoing "agonizing reappraisal", and it will be interesting and important to see what emerges and whether the CRUSADE finds ways to establish useful and viable working relationships with low-income groups without giving these groups a major voice in its organization. The CRUSADE, like all other non-poor, enabling, groups also has to make a decision as to whether it will be dominated by the styles and perhaps the prejudices of its sources of funds, and whether it will work so hard at linkage to government that it becomes over-identified with that end of the chain!

The NATIONAL COUNCIL ON AGRICULTURAL LIFE AND LABOR in Washington and their supporters in the UNITED PACKING HOUSE WORKERS office in Chicago, report passage in the House of H.R. 13712, the minimum wage bill which includes first scant coverage for farm laborers. The current push has shifted to the collective bargaining front, with pressure on Congressmen to get hearings held in the House on the Burton bill, H.R. 14281 before the Senate acts on S. 1866, their collective bargaining bill, since this is the tactic which might produce passage of this vital extension of rights for farm workers. WRITE YOUR CONGRESSMAN!

A WALK FOR DECENT WELFARE from Cleveland to the state capital in Columbus begins on June 20 under the auspices of the OHIO STEERING COMMITTEE FOR ADEQUATE WELFARE whose announcement of this new march in behalf of human rights and needs explains that their committee is composed of three representatives from each county--two of these, recipients. The explanation of the WALK FOR DECENT WELFARE also tells how badly Ohio meets the needs of its welfare recipients, giving those on general relief and AFDC about 78% of the standard which the state sets as the minimum for health and decency. This Ohio development is a part of the ferment all over the country about the limitations and inhumanity of the welfare system!

THE CAPITAL SCENE

The Legislature now goes back into session after the recess for the Primary, in the effort to wrap up both the budget and pending special session legislation. There are bad hang-ups over constitutional revision, increases in salaries for legislators, and other matters less than earth-shaking to the poverty front.

The Budget portion of the session still has possibilities for earmarked funding, on the limited current scale, of recipient organizations; but to counter this favorable possibility there still exists a chance for curtailment of grant levels through "closing" of the Budget totals. It is probably too late to do more than pray about results, unless groups are close enough to their legislators to immediately seek help on both points.

Medicare in California has gone up and down like a yo-yo in the outlook for decent coverage of the medically needy (See previous Bulletins, especially Bulletin #8, p. 3). The federal authorities have now apparently capitulated to pressure from the state administration, and are sanctioning only a token, beginning program for the medically needy. Getting this beefed up will take a lot of doing if it is to happen before these poor people get sicker and older while all governmental levels "take pride" in medicare but fail to deliver adequate coverage and benefits!

DELANO AND THE NATIONAL FARM WORKERS ASSOCIATION

The last minute news from Delano--not reported in the press up to this minute--is that the Schenley contract will be signed very soon and will have wage levels above those sought in the strike.

The press does confirm the news that the TEAMSTERS have made a commitment to avoid a head-on collision and conflict with the NFWA on DiGiorgio employees, but will continue to organize farm workers. If the TEAMSTERS really mean to make a big push--in the spirit of Delano, and in cooperation with the NFWA--all the friends of labor and Delano will be delighted. If labor in-fighting by the Teamsters and other unions is going to be the next move in farm labor organizing, then many of us will grieve and some will get furious with the labor movement!

The boycott of DiGiorgio's S&W Fine Foods is going to be stepped up! Get in the act!

QUOTES...

Early in May, SARGENT SHRIVER told a Yale Law School audience that the "Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 is for the poor what the National Labor Relations Act was for unions." He said that the legislation "recognizes the principle of representation, of full participation, of fair bargaining; it establishes a new relationship and new grievance procedures between the poor and the rest of society." (This seems to be a different approach than Shriver used in Washington at the CITIZENS CRUSADE meeting and proves that this member of the Kennedy clan is learning! Could the next step be using CAP agencies to facilitate, encourage and fund organizing of the poor?)

Another "with-it" comment comes from J. M. WEDEMEYER, Director of the California State Department of Social Welfare. Addressing the first group of masters degree graduates of Fresno State College on June 3, Wedemeyer told the fledgling social work professionals that "in the face of . . . criticism and protests . . . from the community power structure (the students must be prepared) to move forward into new areas, such as . . . organization of the poor themselves, that can be relied upon to bring even more protests and criticism."

ITEMS...

On May 20 the Los Angeles WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE was established under the chairmanship of Mrs. Elizabeth Jackson. The COMMITTEE has obtained more funding pledges and soon hopes to begin functioning in support of existing WR groups, and to aid in the establishment of new ones. The NEIGHBORHOOD ADULT PARTICIPATION PROJECT is committed to aiding the work of the L. A. COMMITTEE, through the assignment of aides to collateral activities in the campaign.

The STUDENTS MEDICAL CONFERENCE IN LOS ANGELES, helped by the L. A. MEDICAL COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS has developed a summer project for bringing medical students to urban and rural ghettos. Potentially the project could foster the same kind of kinship between the poor and doctors as exists between lawyers and Negroes in the civil rights struggles in the South.

JOBART (Justice on Bay Area Rapid Transit) punctuated months of activity in a protest march on June 5 in Oakland, in order to dramatize their efforts to obtain employment for minorities on BART construction, reduce dislocation of poor persons by BART, and to get the BART tracks off the ground level in Richmond. (This latter scheme walls off the Negro ghetto!)

QUESTIONS: Since JOBART and the San Francisco Chronicle (Michael Harris' research articles) have established the fact that BART is both indifferent to human problems and is a planning and engineering mess, why could not lawyers get a court order to stop this project until it satisfies the serious criticisms levelled against it? Or, as an alternative, why should not public hearings be sought immediately from a major committee of either the State Senate or Assembly?

FOUNDATION AND BULLETIN NEWS

The FOUNDATION--just in case you don't know the facts--continues to be unfunded and "pure" which is a cause for dismay and rejoicing. The O.E.O. finally turned down our funding proposal for this fiscal year, but expressed interest and may reconsider in the new year beginning July 1st. We are not holding our breath in view of the gloomy fiscal news on O.E.O. from Washington, but who knows, miracles may happen.

The BULLETIN gets read in many different places and is used for many good purposes. The "swingers" quote us, with and without identifying the source, and they all have our blessing in advance. The BULLETIN thus gets moral support, which is heartening, and it is not to minimize the value of this to say that such support has limits! If you would like to provide both moral and financial support use the TEAR-OFF coupon below!

Our next issue will be written and mailed the latter part of July and will be a July-August issue.

JEROME N. SAMPSON, EDITOR

TEAR OFF

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